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ABSTRACT

This guide presents interviewing techniques for managers who hire young and/or entry-level workers in small businesses. The guide is designed to help managers (1) give the information the applicant needs in an employment interview; (2) keep personal biases from entering into the hiring process; (3) ask questions that will get the information they need to make a hiring decision; and (4) structure the interview so that they can establish rapport with the applicant, but still maintain control of the conversation. The guide uses case studies to illustrate the interviewing techniques that are suggested. Key points are summarized at the end of the booklet, and a review quiz with answers is provided. A list of suggested resources completes the guide. (KC)

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# Who's There?

## Interviewing Techniques For Small Businesses

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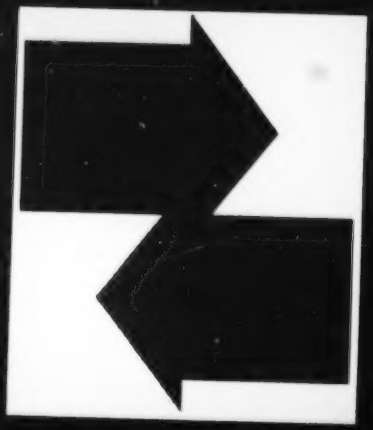

# Who's There?

## Interviewing Techniques For Small Businesses

**the WorkForce series for small businesses**

The National Child Labor Committee
1501 Broadway • New York, New York 10036

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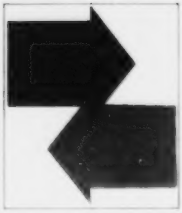

## What This Guide Will Help You Do More Effectively

- Give the information the applicant needs in an employment interview.
- Keep personal biases from entering into the hiring process.
- Ask questions which will get the information you need to make a decision.
- Structure the interview so that you can establish rapport with the applicant, but still maintain control of the conversation.

## CASE STUDY

### Help!

George Kieropolis, who owned a coffee shop, badly needed more help on the evening shift because a new movie theater had opened down the street. He was glad that business had picked up so much, but he didn't have time to look around a lot for a new worker, so he just put a "help wanted" sign in the window.

Before long, a young woman named Lisa Chun came into the shop to inquire about the job. It was nearly six o'clock and the coffee shop was starting to get very busy.

George liked Lisa immediately. She was neat, well dressed, and very polite. He took her to a booth in the back to talk to her.

**George**

So you want to be a waitress, huh? How come?

**Lisa**

Well, sir, I like people and you get to meet all different types of people in this job. Also, I think that I can make more money at this than at some other kind of work.

**George**

Did you graduate from high school?

**Lisa**

Yes.

**George**

If I hire you, how long do you plan to stay on the job?

**Lisa**

For as long as you want me to stay.

**George**

When can you start?

**Lisa**

How about tomorrow?

**George**

Good. Come in at three o'clock.

**Lisa**

Thank you. I'll see you then.

Lisa was on her way out the door when George called after her: "By the way, you'll get three dollars an hour plus tips."

1. **Make a list of all the facts Lisa knows about the job after the interview.**
2. **List all of the facts that George knows about Lisa from the interview.**
3. **What other information does George need in order to know whether Lisa can do the job?**
5. **Has George matched the right person to the right job?**

**Here is another version of the same hiring process.**

When George realized that the opening of the new theater was making the evening shift at his coffee shop a lot busier, he thought he might need more help waiting tables. He watched carefully that night to see where service was lagging and concluded that all he needed to do was add one person to cover the peak period from four until midnight. The next day George put a sign in the window that said "Help Wanted — Apply inside from 2:00 to 4:00."

Shortly after two on the first day the sign was up, Lisa Chun walked into the shop to apply for the job. George grabbed a note pad and pen and took Lisa to a quiet booth in the back so that they could talk.

**George**

I'm glad you stopped in. My name is George Kieropolis. Don't try to pronounce the last name. Just call me George. What's your name?

**Lisa**

Lisa Chun.

**George**

It's nice to meet you, Lisa. Have you ever worked in the restaurant business before?

**Lisa**

No, but I worked in a bakery part-time while I was in school.

**George**

Tell me some of the things you did there.

**Lisa**

I waited on customers, rang up sales, kept the cases stocked, and sometimes helped clean up in the back.

**George**

What did you like about the job?

**Lisa**

I liked waiting on the customers. I enjoyed meeting different people.

**George**

What didn't you like about the job?

**Lisa**

(Laughing) Cleaning up when someone spilled flour all over!

**George**

Ugh! That must have made a mess. Tell me why you left the job, Lisa.

**Lisa**

It was only a part-time job after school and the pay was very low. I want a job where I can make more money and get more experience.

**George**

More experience doing what? Can you give me an example?

**Lisa**

Well, I want something that will give me a chance to learn new things and meet new people.

**George**

O.K. The things you would be doing here are very similar to your job at the bakery. You would be waiting on customers, writing out sales checks, clearing tables, setting up, that kind of thing. How long do you think it would take you to learn the job?

**Lisa**

I learn fast. I could probably learn it in a couple of weeks.

**George**

O.K. When could you start work?

**Lisa**

I can start any time.

**George**

Good. The pay is only three dollars an hour, but with the tips you should make about $225 a week if you work full-time. The shift is four until midnight and you'll have Sundays and Mondays off for the first couple of months. Later you can start rotating weekends with Carl and Sylvia. After you've worked for a month, you'll be covered by our health insurance. We're pretty busy on that shift because of the new theater down the street, but the customers seem pretty interesting. Since this is a small place, we all chip in when things get busy, so you would be expected to give others a hand with things like cleaning up and making salads. Does that suit you?

**Lisa**

That sounds good to me.

**George**

How about traveling to work? How will you get here from where you live?

**Lisa**

I'll take the bus. It's only a few stops.

**George**

That shouldn't be a problem, but I want to impress upon you the importance of being on time. If you're not here, it will make everyone else's job harder.

**Lisa**

Yes, I understand that.

**George**

Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?

**Lisa**

Yes. You mentioned health insurance. What does that cover?

**George**

It's a standard group hospitalization policy. Accidents and illnesses are covered,

including doctor bills. They pay 80% of all hospital costs after the deductible.

**Lisa**

Okay.

**George**

Any other questions?

**Lisa**

Would I get any vacation time?

**George**

Yes. You'll get one week after one year. If you stay two years, you'll get two weeks.

**Lisa**

That's fine.

**George**

Anything else?

**Lisa**

What would I have to wear?

**George**

Oh! I forgot that. I'm glad you asked. I'd like you to wear a black skirt or pants and white blouse. You'll also have to wear an apron, which we provide.

**Lisa**

That's all I wanted to ask.

**George**

Great. Just let me get your address and phone number. I'll call you back and let you know if you have the job by tomorrow evening. I still have a couple more people to interview.

**Lisa**

Thanks. It was nice meeting you.

**George**

My pleasure. I'll talk to you tomorrow either way.

1. **Make a list of all the facts that Lisa knows about the job after the interview.**

2. **List all of the facts that George knows about Lisa from the interview.**

3. **Does George need more information to know whether Lisa is the right person for the job? What more does he need to find out?**

4. **How did the tone of the first interview differ from the tone of the second interview? What message did that convey to Lisa?**

## CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The answers to these questions should give you a clear idea of why the first interview was a failure and why the second was a success.

The first interview didn't tell George much about Lisa and didn't tell Lisa much about the job. The result is likely to be misunderstandings on the job because Lisa doesn't know what to expect. Also, George doesn't know enough about Lisa's capabilities to make use of her talents or to focus his training on the places where she has little experience.

George lost control of the first interview because he didn't plan for it: Lisa came in when the restaurant was busy so they couldn't talk easily and George couldn't give her his complete attention; George didn't have a clear idea of the information he wanted to get; and he didn't remember to cover some extremely important points such as work hours which could easily affect Lisa's decision to stay with the job.

In contrast, the second interview showed planning and careful thought about just what kind of person he needed. Because he was focused on what the job required, he was able to get a lot more relevant information. Consequently, George was in a better position to match the job with the right applicant and reduce the likelihood — and cost — of fast turnover in the position.

## Making the Most of an Interview

A job application or resume will give you some general background information about a job applicant. It will tell you whether the person has the basic qualifications needed for the position, but it will not give you a sense of who the person is or what the person can bring to your business. A face-to-face interview can do that, which is one reason it has become a standard part of the hiring process in most places.

**The purpose of an interview is twofold: to get information from the applicant and to give information about the job to the applicant. When both purposes are accomplished during an interview, both you and your new employee know what to expect. That reduces the chances that either of you have made a mistake.**

### Why Interviews Are So Important

A good interview can cut your turnover rate, so it is to your advantage to make interviews count for you. In a small business, picking your staff well is the single most important factor in running your company smoothly. You can't afford a worker who will leave after a month or two.

High turnover — even in an entry-level job — can make the difference between profit and loss for the year. To find out how much turnover costs you, add the amount of time you spend hiring and training a worker at *your* rate of pay and the worker's pay for the same period. Add the cost of your bookkeeper's salary for processing the new person, and any money you spend for employee benefits, F.I.C.A., and insurance. In addition, figure in the cost of finding the employee — for example, the cost of running a classified ad, the time you spend interviewing people, and the time it takes you to train someone.

It is easy to see that one turnover costs a lot of money — not including the costs you can't calculate such as aggravation, poor relations with your customers, and the time it takes other workers to take up the slack.

**One turnover costs most small businesses about $1,500. If this happens to you more than once a year in the same job, you are losing a lot of money you don't need to lose.**

### What Can Interviews Tell You?

Many employers have unrealistic expectations about what they can accomplish in an interview. For example, they think that they can determine whether a person is honest or whether a person will get along with a particular co-worker. An interview just can't tell you that.

**You can reasonably expect an interview to tell you if the applicant can do the job, if the applicant can be trained to do the job, and if there are any obvious ways the applicant is incompatible with your business.**

Keep in mind that while you will be asking questions designed to elicit certain facts about the applicant, you will hear the answers in a very subjective way. That is, the answers will be filtered through your personal value system, perceptions, priorities, and biases.

What this means in a practical way is that you need to try to be objective and not allow your personal tastes to influence your evaluation of the applicant. If, for example, you detest shirts with Hawaiian prints and the applicant turns up for the interview wearing one, try to remember that it doesn't really have anything to do with how well the applicant

can do the job. You can work out the details of the dress you expect at work after you have found out whether the applicant is qualified.

Sometimes personal tastes take the form of preconceived ideas about certain groups of people. These notions usually have nothing to do with how well the people can do the job. In addition, most of us aren't usually aware of how many of these ideas we carry around without thinking.

**These ideas about people are part of our conditioning. They come from our past experiences, from our families, and from our communities. As an employer, you have the responsibility to understand what your assumptions are about the people you interview — and the responsibility for making sure they don't affect your judgment in a job interview.**

The answers you give to the following questions will help you pinpoint the places where you have assumptions which need to be examined.

### Do You Share These Assumptions?

1. Women should not be hired for certain jobs because they aren't physically as strong as men.
   Yes No

2. Young women with pre-school children will be absent and late for work often.
   Yes No

3. Black and Hispanic people are sometimes difficult to understand on the phone.
   Yes No

4. Young people don't want to work.
   Yes No

5. Youths don't listen and can't follow directions.
   Yes No

6. Unless a young man is married, he has no sense of responsibility.
   Yes No

7. Young workers are only interested in getting a pay check.
   Yes No

8. Women — especially young women — are too emotional and get upset over minor problems.
   Yes No

9. Young, entry-level workers have no job experience and require too much training to learn simple tasks.
   Yes No

10. Young people are too moody and tend to daydream a lot.
    Yes No

11. Young workers want to start at the top and have glamorous jobs even though they have no work experience.
    Yes No

12. Young workers are hard to communicate with.
    Yes No

13. I lose customers when I hire blacks because my customers are prejudiced.
    Yes No

### What Are Your Assumptions?

If your answers to any of these questions were "yes," you have some preconceived ideas about people that you should take a careful look at. Make a point not to let them interfere with your judgment about whether an applicant is capable of doing the job.

For example, many employers would be reluctant to hire an older man or woman for a job as a messenger. This is an example of stereotyping a job — assuming that the grocery bagger or the messenger or the cashier is a certain type of person.

**If you think one of these areas presents a potential problem with an applicant, ask the applicant. Don't assume the person isn't right for the job — give the applicant a chance to show you that he or she is the employee you're looking for.**

## Organizing for the Interview

The more you can prepare for an interview, the more you will get out of it. Most employers have been interviewing long enough that they get a system in their minds and use it in one fashion or another for every interview. There is a lot to be said for using a technique you are familiar with, but sometimes sitting down to think *systematically* about what you do will help pinpoint the things you do well and improve the places where you aren't getting the results you want.

**Here is a short guide to help you conduct better interviews:**

- **Prepare for the interview.**
- **Establish good rapport with the applicant.**
- **Get information about the applicant.**
- **Record essential information.**
- **Give information.**
- **Close the interview.**
- **Evaluate the candidate.**

### Prepare for the Interview

Before you begin interviewing any job applicants, take a few minutes to do some thinking about the job itself. This sounds very basic, but many small business owners have trouble getting the most out of an interview because they don't have a clear idea when they go into it what job they want the applicant to do.

**The first step is to make up a specific profile of the job you want done. This has two purposes: it will help you define exactly what it is you need done and it will enable you to tell applicants exactly what the job will be. This is particularly important in avoiding the "that's-not-my-job" problem.**

Since most small business owners have done all of the jobs in their businesses, the best way to put a profile together is to go through the job step by step and

write down each step. Then go back and mentally walk through a day on the job to make sure you have included everything that is involved. If some duties will only be included when there is overflow from other workers, make a note of that too. It is important that you be able to tell the applicant what his or her regular duties will be and where he or she will be expected to fill in when things get busy.

**After you have made up a job description, make a list of the skills or qualities the applicant must have to be able to do the job.**

Here are some examples: math ability, ability to get along with people, driver's license, experience operating a slicing machine. Be specific about your list — this will help you avoid hiring someone who is over-qualified or someone who doesn't have enough of the basic skills for you to train him or her effectively.

**After you have made this list, write down the questions you think will elicit this information. Gear your questions to the qualifications you have listed. Decide what information you need to make your decision.**

Think about where you will conduct the interview. You'll need a quiet place where you and the applicant can talk privately. Avoid interruptions. Give yourself a chance to listen carefully. Think of the interview as an investment in your company. Invest the time and your return will be the right worker for the job.

### Establish Rapport

Make a point to greet the applicant warmly when you begin the interview. Interviews make everyone nervous — especially young people who don't always have a lot of experience with the interview process.

Realize that an applicant's failure to make eye contact with you is probably due to nervousness, not a personality trait. The more at ease you can put the applicant, the more information you will be able to get from him or her. Being open and friendly will make it easier for both of you to talk.

**A good interview should be a conversation with a purpose, not an interrogation.**

When you start, give the applicant a minute to get used to you and the surroundings. Break the ice with something neutral. Ask about hobbies or comment on something of interest to you both.

Remember, your style will tell the youth how to react: if you let the youth know you want to hear what he or she has to say, the applicant will be much more willing to speak freely. On the other hand, if you are very formal, you will get tense, formal responses — not an idea of what the applicant is like as a person.

## CASE STUDY

## Clam Up

Jeff Markham supervised workers in the copying department of a photo slide studio. He had advertised for an entry-level worker who would make copies of slides on a machine and mount the slides in cardboard frames.

Carmen Lopez arrived on time for her interview and was neatly dressed. He looked over her application as she entered his office.

**Jeff**

Carmen? Hi, I'm Jeff Markham. Please, sit down. Just give me a minute to finish reading your application and then we can talk.
I see you live uptown. Did you have any trouble getting here?

**Carmen**

No.

**Jeff**

Good. I used to live in your neighborhood a few years ago, and I miss it since I moved. It's an interesting place to live, don't you think?

**Carmen**

It's okay.

**Jeff**

I used to like to go to the park. Do you go to the park at all?

**Carmen**

No. I don't like sports.

**Jeff**

Do you enjoy photography?

**Carmen**

I don't do it very much.

**Jeff**

Do you ever take any pictures at all?

**Carmen**

Yes. At family gatherings — my friends, things like that.

**Jeff**

That's good. That's related to the work we do here. We provide all types of photo processing services. The opening we have is for someone to make copies of slides. This is mostly done by a machine which is simple to operate. You can learn it in no time. It also involves mounting the finished slides and general help around the lab. Do you think you would like this type of work?

**Carmen**

Yes, I do.

**Jeff**

Why?

**Carmen**

I don't understand.

**Jeff**

What do you think you would like about this type of work?

**Carmen**

Well. Uh . . . I . . . ah . . . I think it would be interesting. I could learn something. I like to work with my hands.

**Jeff**

I see. What sort of things do you like to do?

**Carmen**

I like crafts. And I knit and sew.

**Jeff**

That requires a lot of patience and concentration.

**Carmen**

Yes it does.

**Jeff**

Good. You'll need both on this job. I see that you dropped out of high school. Could you tell me something about the reasons for that?

**Carmen**

Ah . . . well . . . I . . . ah . . . I had a lot of family problems and I wasn't doing well in school.

**Jeff**

I see. Do you have any plans to go back to school at all?

**Carmen**

Yes. I'm going to classes now to prepare for the G.E.D. exam.

**Jeff**

That's fine. I see you have no work experience listed. Did you ever have a job after school or a summer job?

**Carmen**

Yes. Sort of.

**Jeff**

Tell me something about what you did.

**Carmen**

I taught crafts to girls in my sister's Girl Scout troop.

**Jeff**

That must have been fun. How long did you do that?

**Carmen**

A year.

**Jeff**

It seems to me that you really do have a lot of patience and can concentrate. As I said, this job requires both. How are you at following directions?

**Carmen**

Pretty good. I can read directions for things like crafts and games. I follow them all right.

**Jeff**

This job pays the minimum wage. Once you learn the job, we'll teach you other things and your salary will be increased. We also give merit raises if you do well on the job. Is the minimum wage acceptable to you?

**Carmen**

Yes.

**Jeff**

We have a very liberal dress code here. Just be neat and clean. Most people wear jeans.

**Carmen**

Oh, great!

**Jeff**

When would you be able to start?

**Carmen**

I can start any time.

**Jeff**

Would you like to take a look at the shop?

**Carmen**

Sure. OK!

**Jeff**

Come on, I'll show you around.

## CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

1. Make a list of all the facts the interviewer knows about the applicant.

2. List the facts that the applicant knows about the job.

3. How was the interviewer successful in this instance?

4. What was the biggest problem this interviewer had to overcome? Why was he successful in doing it?

### Get Information

One purpose of the interview is to get information from the applicant about his or her expectations for the job and information about whether this applicant can do the job. If you have prepared possible questions as part of writing the job description, then you will be better able to make sure you haven't overlooked something important. In addition, you will have the advantage of having the same information from all of the applicants so that you can evaluate them more effectively.

Be flexible as you ask the questions you prepared. Guide the conversation from the general to the specific and from possibly sensitive areas to more neutral ones. Be able to follow up answers that interest you without getting sidetracked.

Listen carefully to the youth's responses and try to listen objectively. Don't involve yourself in arguments — your purpose is to find out whether this applicant can do the job. In one sense you should take the position of an impartial observer. The point is to learn about the applicant, not to tell the applicant about yourself.

The kind of questions you ask have a lot to do with the kind of answers you will get. One common problem with questions is that interviewers frequently frame them so that all they get is monosyllabic responses. For example, if you ask, "How do you feel about doing this kind of work," the most likely response is "Fine." If, on the other hand, you ask "What do you think you will like best about this kind of work," the applicant will give you more information. Framing questions well is particularly important when you are trying to get information about the young person's interest in the work.

Another kind of question that won't result in much information is the "give-away" question. That means that the question is slanted to show what the "right" answer is. For example, "Your work is always neat, isn't it" will certainly get you a "yes" but not much else. Who would reply differently to that kind of question? On the other hand, if you ask "How legible is your handwriting," you are much more likely to get information you can use.

When you ask questions, try not to antagonize the applicant. Use neutral words: use "informal" or "casual" rather than "sloppy." You can soften tough questions which might intimidate an applicant by using qualifiers when you speak. For example:

- "Is it possible that . . ."
- "How did you happen to . . ."
- "To some extent . . ."
- "Suppose that . . ."

Recognize that no one wants to reveal unfavorable information. Sometimes, however, that is precisely the information you need. One way to reassure the person is to say, "Look, I know this is hard to talk about, but I really need to know why you left your last job." Let the youth know you are not judging him or her by saying things like, "I know that is a tough situation to be in."

**Be aware that there is some information you are legally not entitled to have: in most circumstances, applicants are under no obligation to disclose the details of drug or alcohol problems, of psychiatric treatment, or of arrests not followed by conviction. (See the section below which will explain more about what questions may not be asked of job applicants.)**

Finally, follow up on your questions: ask the youth to elaborate on what has been said. One way to follow up is to

reflect what you have heard back to the applicant to make sure that you both understand what has been said the same way. For example:

**Applicant**
I don't have any experience working.

**Interviewer**
Do you mean that you have never worked for pay before?

Remember that young people often have a hard time talking to adults and need to be prodded some in order to give the information you need. They are usually very nervous and sometimes shy. The more you can make the applicant feel at ease, the more you will get out of the interview.

Think about how you would feel in the same circumstances and use that as a guideline for the way to conduct the interview. What would you want to say to the interviewer? What would you like to hear from an interviewer?

### Questions Not To Ask

**The law prohibits the asking of some questions in an employment interview in order to protect the applicant's right to privacy and to protect the applicant from discrimination because of race, gender, religion, or age.**

The basic law governing the questions you may and may not ask is Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The law protects certain *classes* of people: racial minorities, women, religious minorities, people of certain national origins. Other laws protect the handicapped (including rehabilitated alcoholics and drug abusers), ex-offenders, and people over the age of 40 from discrimination because of these factors.

**As a rule, any question which has an adverse effect on any of these groups is unlawful unless it is justified by a business necessity.**

"Business necessity" is usually interpreted very strictly. For example, a producer would not generally be vulnerable to a charge of sex discrimination for hiring a woman instead of a man to play the part of Scarlett O'Hara in a remake of "Gone With The Wind." However, a boutique owner who says he wants to hire white sales clerks instead of blacks because his customers prefer to be served by whites is likely to have a big legal problem on his hands.

**Some questions which appear to be neutral operate to disqualify members of a protected group more frequently than others and so are prohibited.**

For example, a requirement that all employees be high school graduates (regardless of the jobs for which they are applying) will probably disqualify more minority applicants than white applicants because generally more whites finish high school in the United States than do blacks. Such a question would then be prohibited unless a high school diploma was *necessary* to do the job. For example, a diploma probably isn't necessary for a job as a messenger, but it probably is necessary for someone who is going to work as an accounting clerk.

**As a rule of thumb, qualifications should always be directly related to the work to be performed.**

**The best way to comply with the law is not to ask for information unrelated to a decision about the applicant until after you have hired someone.**

For example, you may need information about the applicant's medical history for the health insurance policy. Wait un-

til after you have hired someone to ask — that information is not properly a part of a pre-employment interview.

Here are some things you shouldn't ask about before you hire someone unless they are *specifically* related to the job to be performed:

- Height and weight
- Age (You may ask a young worker his or her age in order to make sure that you are not violating the child labor laws.)
- Citizenship
- Marital status or dependents
- Illness or physical handicaps
- Relatives of the applicant who may work for you
- Source of referral to the job
- Educational level
- Arrests not followed by conviction (You may in some cases ask about *convictions* if they are related to the job to be performed, but you may not ask about youthful offender adjudications or juvenile offenses.)

The law is sometimes confusing with regard to the questions you may and may not ask before a hiring decision is made. *You should make a point to confine your questions to areas which are directly related to the job.* If you plan your questions ahead of time you will have a good idea of what you need to know. *After* you have hired someone, you may inquire into some areas more broadly — but as a rule, you shouldn't ask anything you don't *have* to know.

If it seems that you will need to ask about something which may be legally suspect, call your local office of the state's Fair Employment Practices Commission or the nearest office of the federal Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (known as the E.E.O.C.) and ask if your question is permissable. In addition, the local office of your state employment service can usually help you. Often they print helpful guides on anti-discrimination laws for the employer.

**Sometimes employers think that the anti-discrimination laws prevent them from asking the questions they need to ask in order to find out whether they have the right person for the job. Actually, the range of prohibited questions is really quite small. You may ask whatever you wish that relates to the real qualifications needed to do the work well: you may ask a potential typist to take a typing test, you may ask a potential cashier to demonstrate that he can make change, and you may ask a potential electrician's helper to demonstrate that she can operate a voltage regulator. And that should be your first concern.**

Anti-discrimination laws cover your job application as well as your interview, so check to make sure you aren't asking prohibited questions until *after* the hiring decision has been made. A sample job application is included here to give you an idea of how you can get the information you need without violating the law.

### Record Essential Information

Write down the important information that is brought out in the interview. Don't trust your memory: if you are interviewing several youths for the job, you may confuse them in your mind unless you have a written record. Be clear and concrete in taking notes so that the one- or two-word phrases that seem perfectly clear to you at the time won't be a puzzle later.

**Note only what is relevant to getting the job done.** Avoid psychological interpretations. If you write, "Youth says she doesn't like to meet people," and helping customers is part of the job, that is a valid notation. Writing, "Youth seems dishonest," is not.

Don't take such copious notes that the entire interview is recorded. That will stymie communication and prevent you from listening to what is being said. Strike a balance so that at the end of the interview you have clear, concise notes about the most important information.

### Alternatives to Desk Interviews

You might want to consider a different approach to the sit-down interview at your desk. One alternative is to show the youth around and talk while you are walking. This approach works best in a store or plant where there are different kinds of operations going on. It works least effectively in a small office setting.

Many owners of small businesses conduct "on-the-fly" interviews and even group interviews in an effort to save time. In the long run, this approach will cost you more time, money, and grief than individual interviews because you won't be able to get a true sense of any of the applicants unless you're a gifted psychic.

### Give Information

**Part of your responsibility in the interview is to give the applicant the information he or she needs in order to make an informed decision about whether the job is the right one for him or her.**

That means giving the youth general information about your business and about the products or services you provide. Give the applicant a full description of the job for which he or she is applying and make sure you tell him or her something about the style of working in your business. If duties are defined flexibly and everyone pitches in to help, say so. On the other hand, if your business is more formal in organization and people work only at assigned stations, tell the applicant that too. Work style is an important consideration to most people trying to make a decision about a job.

Don't omit important information because the applicant may not want to hear it. For example, if you have an opening for a general helper and one of the tasks is cleaning the restrooms, say so. Don't assume the youth knows that this is part of the job. If you don't mention this, and the youth is hired, cleaning restrooms will come as an unwelcome surprise and you'll be hanging out the "Help Wanted" sign once again.

**Be clear about the duties of the job and about your expectations. Don't forget, worker turnover costs you money.**

### Close the Interview

Set a time for the interview to end and stick to it. Don't waste your time or the applicant's time. *You* have to let the youth know when the interview is over. Don't let it drag on after you have accomplished your purpose or let the interview degenerate into idle chatter.

A good way to close the interview is to say something positive about the applicant. Even if you don't want to hire him or her, you can send the applicant away feeling good about the conversation and about your company. Remember there are very nice people who are a complete mismatch for the job you are trying to fill. For example, say "you have a very pleasant manner" or "I like your sense of humor" or "you are really enthusiastic."

**Close the interview by being very clear about whether or not the youth has the job.**

Tell the applicant if you are interviewing others before making a decision. Let the youth know when you will contact him or her.

### Checking References

If after the interview you are interested in hiring an applicant, you may decide to check his or her references.

Opinions about the usefulness of checking references are divided: some people think that the person to whom you will speak will never tell you anything useful and others think that the reference is a gold mine of information.

**As a rule of thumb, if you think a reference will help, then check it, but don't use it as a substitute for what you have learned about the applicant during the interview — your judgment is always the most reliable.**

For entry-level jobs, you probably only need to verify employment data such as the dates of employment, the frequency of absences, and salary. If you decide to go deeper, have a clear idea of the information you want to get. Ask yourself:

- What do I want this employee to do?
- What do I need to know to determine if this person is right for this job?

**Recognize what a reference can't tell you.** A reference can't tell you why something went wrong on the job. Work problems occur for a lot of reasons, so if a reference tells you that a youth isn't motivated, for example, and your impression was quite the opposite, be aware that the problem could have been the employer's. The same youth might be highly motivated in a different job and under different supervision. You simply cannot make that particular judgment from the information a reference can supply.

### Evaluate the Candidate

Only you can determine whether a particular youth is the right person for the job you have in mind. It is important to remember that for most entry-level jobs almost all the people you interview will be qualified. You are looking for something else: willingness to do the job and potential for learning. You can evaluate that by getting a sense of the whole person.

Below are some questions to consider to help you select the right person:

- What tasks are included in the job?
- Does the applicant have the capability to learn them in a reasonable amount of time?
- What assumptions am I making about this applicant?
- Will this applicant fit into my kind of business?

Focusing on the answers to these questions will help you eliminate some candidates and narrow the field to a manageable size. Keep checking your attitudes and assumptions about the people to make sure that your personal biases are not interfering with your selection. Remember it is the person's willingness and ability to do the job that matters.

- **The purpose of an employment interview is to get information and to give information: you need to get information which will help you determine if the applicant is capable of and willing to perform the job; the applicant needs to know about the job and your company in order to make a good employment decision.**
- **Prepare for the Interview**
  **Decide what information you need and what the youth will need to know about the job.**
- **Check Your Assumptions**
  **Don't let personal biases creep into hiring decisions.**
- **Establish Rapport**
  **Treat the youth with respect and courtesy. Establish a warm and friendly atmosphere to make communication easier.**
- **Get Information**
  **Establish the facts you are looking for so that you can make an intelligent decision.**
- **Make sure your questions relate directly to the job to be performed. The law does not permit you to ask about facts such as marital status, health, race, age, and arrests not followed by conviction before you hire an applicant.**
- **Record Essential Information**
  **Be clear and concrete in taking notes about important information.**
- **Give Information**
  **Give the applicant the information about the company and the job.**
- **Close the Interview**
  **Close the interview at the proper time so that you don't waste your time or the youth's time.**

## Review

**Check the correct answers.**

1. The purpose of an employment interview is to:
   A. Give and get information.
   B. Hire someone.
   C. Promote someone.
   D. Weed out incompetent workers.
   E. Set salary structure.

2. It is important to conduct an interview with a prospective employee because:
   A. It cuts turnover.
   B. Candidates know what to expect.
   C. Candidates know what fringe benefits apply to them.
   D. You can identify potential troublemakers.
   E. You can fulfill Equal Opportunity Employment regulations.

3. To estimate the cost of employee turnover, you should consider the following:
   A. Amount of time it takes to hire and train a worker.
   B. The worker's rate of pay.
   C. Your rate of pay.
   D. Bookkeeper's rate of pay.
   E. Cost of fringe benefits.
   F. Number of absences.
   G. Rate of pay of the other workers who have to fill in for the missing worker.

4. A good employment interview should tell you:
   A. If the applicant can do the job.
   B. If the applicant is trainable.
   C. If the applicant will be reliable.
   D. What the applicant really thinks about the job you want to fill.
   E. How to supervise the applicant.
   F. How to discipline the applicant.
   G. Obvious ways the applicant is incompatible with your business.

5. A written job description will help you:
   A. Define skills and knowledge needed to do the job.
   B. Identify areas in which the applicant will need training.
   C. Determine the fringe benefits that are appropriate for the job.
   D. Describe the job to the applicant.
   E. Determine the salary scale for the job.
   F. Identify the applicant's personal characteristics.

6. Some questions a job applicant does not have to answer during an interview include those about religion, criminal records, or age.

☐ True ☐ False

7. Interviews should be conducted in the following ways in order to help you choose the right person for the job:
   A. A sit-down interview on a one-to-one basis.
   B. A group interview.
   C. An interview while touring the plant.
   D. Use other workers to interview the applicant.
   E. At the applicant's home.
   F. At the applicant's school.

8. When hiring an entry-level employee, it is important that the worker have some past work experience.

☐ True ☐ False

9. To evaluate a candidate, you should consider if she or he:
   A. Can learn the tasks in a reasonable period of time.
   B. Will accept the starting salary.
   C. Can get along with other workers.
   D. Will work overtime without extra pay.
   E. Has the potential to do the job well.

10. During an interview, you should confine your questions to those that relate directly to the job.

☐ True ☐ False

## Review Analysis

1. A.
2. A and B.
3. A, B, C, D, E, and G.
4. A, B, and G.
5. A, B, and D.
6. True.
7. A, and if appropriate, C.
8. False.
9. A and E.
10. True.

## RESOURCES

**If you want more information, you will find these books valuable.**

Kenneth Blanchard, Ph.D., and Spencer Johnson, M.D. *The One Minute Manager* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982)

A guide to increasing productivity and getting results from the people you manage.

Daniel Druckman, Richard M. Roxella, and James C. Baxter. *Nonverbal Communication: Survey, Theory and Research* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1982)

This book discusses the relationship between verbal and nonverbal behavior and the effects of cultural and personality differences on behavior.

William L. Siegel. *People Management for Small Business* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1978)

A guide on finding the right employee, planning a training program, communications, motivation, and evaluating employees. This is one of a series of books from this publisher geared to small business owners.

Thomas L. Moffatt. *Selection Interviewing for Managers* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1979)

An in-depth explanation of the interview and selection process from where to look for candidates through making a final decision.

John P. Wanons. *Organizational Entry: Recruitment, Selection, and Socialization of Newcomers* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1980)

A how-to-guide on matching the individual wth the job and the organization.

William H. Mobley. *Employee Turnover: Causes, Consequences, and Control* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1982)

This covers how to analyze employee turnover rates, determine the cause and the costs of turnover, and methods for reducing it.

Gordon F. Shea. *The New Employee: Developing a Productive Human Resource* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1981)

This covers task analysis, on-the-job training, and increasing productivity.

Paul Preston. *Employer's Guide to Hiring and Firing: Strategies, Tactics, Legal Considerations* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1982)

In addition to basic interviewing skills, this book deals with techniques on managing interpersonal conflicts, counseling the problem employee, and firing an employee.

*The National Child Labor Committee* is the nation's only private, non-profit organization which devotes a full program to the critical problem of youth employment. Run by business and voluntary leaders for more than eighty years, the Committee promotes education, training, and job opportunities for youth which are geared to the needs of the nation's businesses.

If you want more information about the Committee or its programs, write us at 1501 Broadway, New York, New York 10036.